

Logos, Ethos, and Pathos: The Path to Persuasion

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Abstract

Most marketers encounter ethical dilemmas that require ethical decision making skills. The “Ethics In-Class Group Debate” is a multi-task project involving researching, writing, speaking, listening, and teamwork. We empirically demonstrate students enhance their ethical efficacy skills and critical thinking, thereby, allowing students to appreciate the nuance of marketing ethical issues.

Marketing educators need to prepare students with the skills to solve real-world marketing problems to support the transition from student to marketing practitioner (Hill & McGinnis, 2007). In the same vein, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) advocates the development of understanding ethical issues and their effects on stakeholders and society. As such, AACSB expects member schools to establish ethical expectations regarding the responsibility of business to society, ethical decision making, and ethical leadership (AACSB, 2004). In turn, educators have made an effort to ensure students learn ethical principles and understand how ethics impacts stakeholders and society (Loe & Ferrell, 2001). Moreover, the American Marketing Association (AMA) promotes the following ethical values: honesty, transparency, fairness, respect, responsibility, and citizenship (AMA, 2012). These values are useful when discussing marketing ethics and its implications to stakeholders.

Debates refer to the process of considering multiple viewpoints and arriving at a judgment (Freely & Steinburg, 2005). Debates promote active learning and mastery of content, as it requires participants and audience members to evaluate competing choices. It also encourages tolerance and response of other viewpoints and helps students to deal with ambiguity (Loe & Ferrell, 2001). Past teaching innovations have used the debate format (Roy & Macchiette, 2005; Roy, 2012) and found it to be effective for enhancing critical thinking, communication, argumentation, and research skills. However, the present research aims to explore the pedagogical effectiveness of in-class debates empirically in terms of ethical efficacy and critical thinking.

Ethics In-Class Group Debates

As a group, students selected a debate and stance (i.e. pro or con) relating to product, pricing, promotion or distribution (Table 1). The director of debate was a guest speaker and provided an argumentation and debate framework for the students.

Logos: Appealing to logic – Critical thinking skills used in a debate include defining the problem, identifying and challenging assumptions, recognizing inconsistencies, and prioritizing the relevance and salience of various points within the overall argument (Kennedy, 2007).

Ethos: Appealing to ethics – Part of appealing to logic involves assessing the credibility of sources to establish argument validity. Once argument validity is established, the communicator can convey expertise. In the information age and era of fake news, educators must focus on teaching students how to assess the quality of information and data and how to use information in an ethical manner.

Pathos: Appealing to emotion – According to Roy and Macchiette (2005), debate involves not only determining what to say, but how to say it. Different methods of persuasion were introduced such as the usage of emotional appeals (i.e. fear, guilt), visual aids (i.e. image, videos) and storytelling (i.e. metaphors, tropes) were introduced.

Student Evaluation of the Ethics In-Class Group Debate

Students enrolled in a graduate-level marketing management course at a Southern U.S. public university took a pre-test survey before ($n = 8$) and after ($n = 4$) the debate, which included an ethical efficacy measure (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree). Ethical efficacy, derived from self-efficacy, is defined as one's confidence and belief in oneself to make an ethical decision when encountering an ethical dilemma (Ferrell 1996). The findings indicate there was a significant difference in ethical efficacy [$t(14) = -4.54, p < .000$] aptitude before the debate compared to after the debate (Table 2). Students ($n = 4$) also evaluated the project (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree) based on five dimensions: participation, enthusiasm, knowledge, relationships, and creativity (Lee and Hoffman, 2014; Vander Schee, 2011). Student perceptions of the project were positive, with means for each dimension over the scale midpoint (Table 3). In line with previous pedagogical research, the project encouraged class participation, helped students get to know one another better, enhanced oral communication, and strengthen the learning experience.

Conclusion

Most issues in marketing are gray rather than black or white. The ethics in-class group debate helps students' critical thinking and argumentation skills, thereby, allowing them to appreciate the nuance of marketing ethical issues. It not only increases their knowledge of marketing topics, it enhances students' ethical efficacy skills.

Table 1: Examples of Debate Topics

Topic: Childhood Obesity

Issue: Is it necessary to create public policy to regulate the marketing of unhealthy food to children?

Pro: Government regulation is needed to restrict the marketing of unhealthy food to children in order to combat the childhood obesity epidemic.

Con: Too much regulation violates the rights of businesses and individuals. Self-regulation and industry codes of conduct should be encouraged instead.

Topic: Clearance Pricing

Issue: Should the use of clearance pricing be regulated?

Pro: Retailers should be able to use the term clearance without having to qualify or justify the amount of the discount.

Con: Because the term clearance is potentially misleading, usage of the term should be regulated and not used unless there are substantial price discounts.

Topic: Native Advertising

Issue: Is using native advertising a deceptive practice?

Pro: Using native advertising is an appropriate way to sell products.

Con: Using native advertising is a form of deceptive marketing.

Topic: Showrooming

Issue: What are the ethical ramifications of showrooming for the consumer and the retailer?

Pro: Showrooming is acceptable consumer behavior, and it is up to the business to respond with a competitive strategy.

Con: Showrooming is a questionable consumer behavior and has the potential to have a negative effect on retail structures and competitive relationships.

Table 2: Ethical Efficacy Paired Sample T-Test

		Pre-test		Post-test	
#		Mean	Std Deviation	Mean	Std Deviation
1	Making ethical decisions in an organization is well within the scope of my abilities.	4	1.22	4.5	0.5
2	I do not anticipate any problems making the correct ethical decision when working for an organization.	3.88	1.27	4.25	0.43
3	I feel confident that my ability to make ethical decisions equals or exceeds those of my peers.	3.88	1.17	4.5	0.5

4	My experience and accomplishments increase my confidence that I will be able to make the correct ethical decisions in an organization.	3.88	1.27	4.5	0.5
5	Ethics is important to me.	4.25	1.3	4.75	0.43
6	Ethics is of no concern to me.	1.63	1.32	2.25	1.64
7	Ethics is irrelevant.	1.5	1.32	1.25	0.43
8	Ethics means a lot to me.	4.13	1.27	4.5	0.5
9	Ethics is useless.	1.63	1.32	1.25	0.43
10	Ethics is valuable.	4.25	1.3	4.75	0.43
11	Ethics is beneficial.	4.13	1.27	4.75	0.43
12	Ethics is not needed.	1.5	1.32	1.5	0.5
13	Participating in principle-based ethics could heighten my awareness of ethical issues and the complexity in reaching the correct decision.	4	1	4.5	0.5

14	I am motivated to learn more about principle based-ethics in the organization.	3.75	0.97	4.25	0.43
15	I believe it would be valuable for my organization to address principle based business ethics.	3.88	1.05	4.5	0.5

Items are rated on a 7 point scale (1) Strongly Disagree and (7) Strongly Agree

Table 3: Learning Experience

#		Mean	Std Deviation
1	It encouraged class participation.	6.25	0.83
2	It made me feel more comfortable about speaking out in class.	5.75	0.83
3	It built enthusiasm for the course.	5	1.22
4	It enhanced my learning experience.	5.25	1.48
5	It increased my interest in topics we had yet to cover.	5	1.87
6	It increased my knowledge of marketing ethics topics.	5.5	1.66
7	It helped me to get to know the instructor in the class.	5	1.73
8	It helped me to get to know others students in the class.	6.25	0.83
9	It inspired my imaginative side.	4.25	0.83
10	It increased my creative input.	4.75	1.48

Items are rated on a 7 point scale (1) Strongly Disagree and (7) Strongly Agree

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